

Saint Louis Premieres

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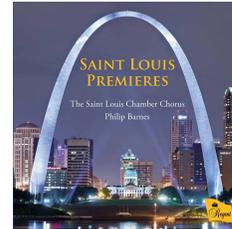
The Saint Louis Chamber Chorus stand out for many reasons, among them a mellifluous approach to ensemble-singing that benefits everything their collective voices touch. The group deserves a special round of applause for its devotion to expanding the choral repertoire. Each of the 11 works performed here is a recent commission written specifically for the gifts director Philip Barnes and his colleagues have honed for decades.

British-born Barnes has led the chorus since 1989, both in core literature and in new scores. On this, his 14th disc with the ensemble, Barnes presides over a varied menu of music by British, New Zealand, Latvian, American and Australian-American composers. Several themes bind the works – marriage, friendship, imbibing, spirituality, dancing – and they share musical immediacy, warmth and clarity of texture.

Two of the selections are traditional yet sound newly minted in the sensitive arrangements by Jon Garrett ('Drink to me only with thine eyes') and Orrin Johnson ('Maker of all things'). Gabriel Jackson's *Felices ter et amplius* is an ebullient paean to marriage, while Judith Bingham's exquisite *Ceaselessly weaving your name* depicts the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope in slow, undulating lines and Clare Maclean employs two poems of Emily Dickinson in her lyrical ode to marriage, *That I did always love*. Lilted and soaring phrases pervade Ēriks Ešensvalds's luminous *On Friendship*, as they do his affectionate *In the bleak midwinter*. Jonathan Dove creates a choral web of buoyant strands in *The Kerry Christmas Carol*.

On a particularly spirited set of notes is Robert Walker's *The Ale Songbook*, replete with bagpipe drones, cautionary sentiments and whimsical activity via verses by Poe, Burns and friends. Sasha Johnson Manning provides another view of the drink in her touching *It is not for kings, Lemuel*. To end the disc, the four beautifully compact songs that comprise Melissa Dunphy's *Suite Remembrance* take splendid advantage of the ensemble's exceptional flexibility and cohesion.

Author: Donald Rosenberg



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midwinter

The Ale Songbook

The Kerry Christmas
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Ceaselessly Weaving
Your Name

Maker of all things

Felices ter et amplius

That I did always love

On friendship

It is not for kings,
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Suite Remembrance

Drink to me only with
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